

February 28, 2019

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing to express my opinion about the proposal for forced regionalization of small school districts (Bills 738, 457, and 874). As a resident of Somers, a parent of two children in Somers Elementary School, and a former teacher, I am strongly opposed to this proposal for numerous reasons. Mainly, I believe that combining towns to make a larger school district will be a detriment to our children's education and to our town as a whole.

My husband and I moved from Enfield to Somers 10 years ago because we wanted to live in a smaller community and we loved the reputation of the Somers School System. When we had children, we didn't even consider CREC or magnet schools mainly because of the high quality of Somers Schools, but also due to the long bus rides and the difficulty of participating in extra-curricular activities.

My children are receiving an excellent education at SES and we couldn't ask for better teachers or staff! Both have had some of the most caring and hardworking teachers I have ever met (and I was a teacher in Hartford for 15 years working with some of the best!). We love the curriculum, access to technology, and the small class sizes. I fear this will be negatively impacted by regionalization resulting in larger class sizes. I can speak from experience when saying that larger class sizes made small group instruction less effective because the groups were too big! Classroom management becomes more difficult and teachers have to spend more time on administrative tasks attributed to the larger class size. This means less attention to small groups and individuals.

Somers currently has a lower than average Per Pupil Expenditure, high SAT scores, and high graduation rate. I'm also concerned how regionalization would impact these statistics and eventually our property values. Somers has a reputation as a high quality school system and many people move here for that reason alone. Smaller districts/school systems allow for great visibility and accessibility of administration and the superintendent for students and parents. Students feel valued when they receive individual positive attention from those in charge. Students who feel appreciated and cared for will work harder and achieve more. Larger districts tend to increase the number of mid-level administrators and administrative support staff, increasing expenses and decreasing accessibility. Most importantly, just because we may reduce Per Pupil Expenditure and other costs does not mean that we will improve academic achievement and shouldn't that be our main priority?

Additional things to consider –

- What happens with schools that are no longer being used? Does the town still need to pay maintenance costs if they are not sold?

- Do our teachers need to reapply for their jobs in the newly structured school system? How many will lose their jobs? This also applies to administrators and other school staff.
- Long bus rides will increase transportation costs.
- How will regionalization affect sports and other after school activities? More students competing to be on the same team will leave many without a place on the team. Where does that leave our children who play for the love of the game, but aren't the best of the best?
- In a larger population, it is harder to have your voice heard. Parents may also have less influence on policies as more voices are added to policy debates.
- Sixteen months from now (July 2020) is not enough time to adequately plan for regionalization and I can't imagine that the decisions made in that short amount of time will be in the best interest of our children.

Thank you for your time and your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

Aime Liggett
Somers, CT